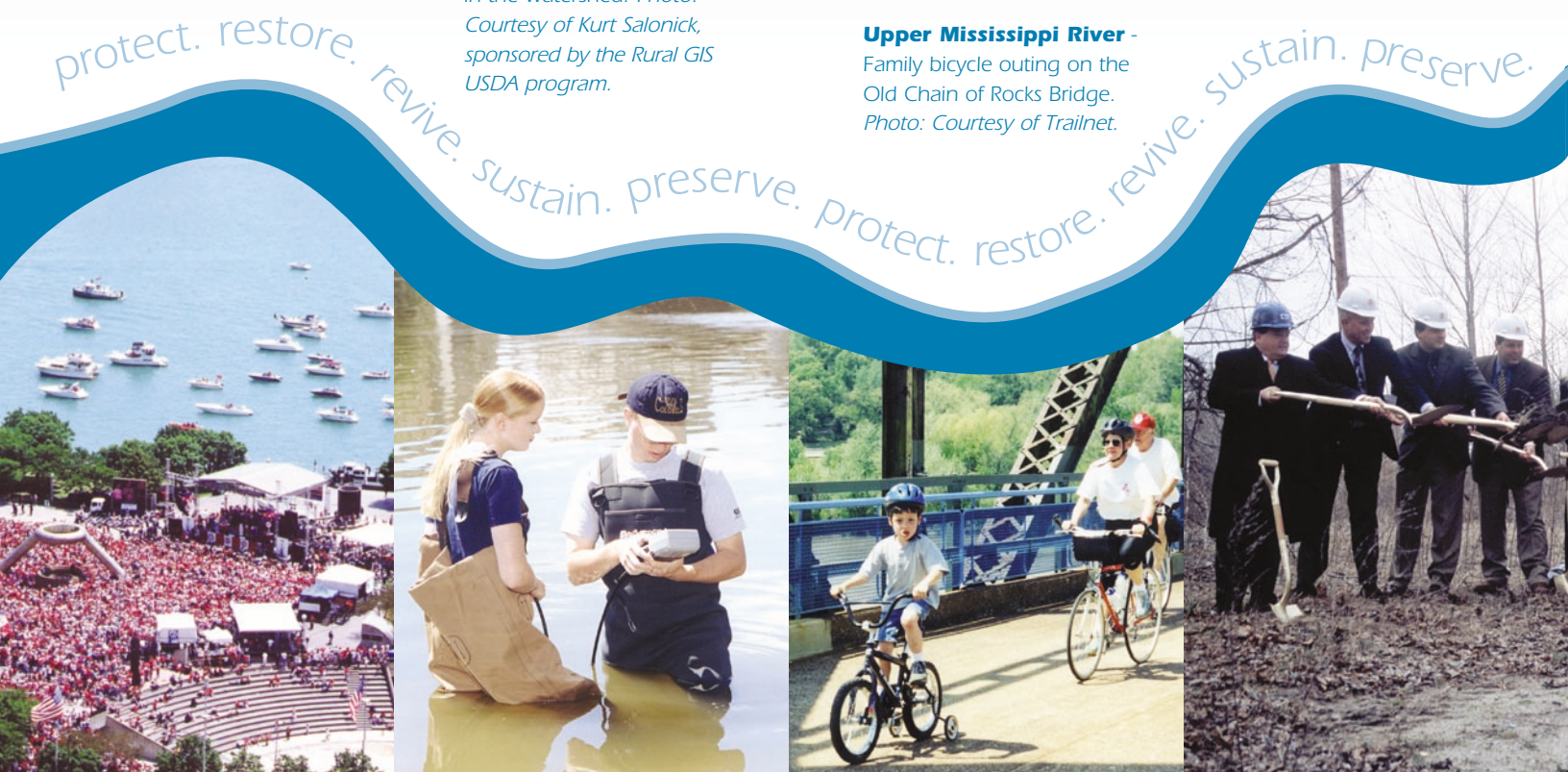


Detroit River - Over 1.2 million people flock to Detroit's waterfront to celebrate the Detroit Red Wings as the 2002 Stanley Cup champions. In total, 17 greenways projects have been or are being constructed along the Detroit River. *Photo: Courtesy of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.*

Upper Susquehanna-Lackawanna Rivers - Measuring real-time water quality in the Susquehanna River. This equipment facilitates environmental assessment and cleanup strategies in the watershed. *Photo: Courtesy of Kurt Salonick, sponsored by the Rural GIS USDA program.*

Woonasquatucket River - Groundbreaking for the Riverside Mills project to restore greenspace and stimulate investment along the Woonasquatucket River in Rhode Island.

Upper Mississippi River - Family bicycle outing on the Old Chain of Rocks Bridge. *Photo: Courtesy of Trailnet.*



Rivers Uniting Communities

Successes of Community Partners of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative

Throughout the communities of our nation, residents take great pride in the places they call home. Residents of river communities recognize that it makes good economic sense to preserve, restore, and protect the natural and cultural assets of the rivers that run through their hills, towns and cities, fields and forests, swamps and bogs, and eventually settle into tidal waters. Communities are working tirelessly to sustain the quality and integrity of our nation's rivers for both present and future generations. The American Heritage Rivers (AHR) Initiative is a creative, community-based

program that is truly making a difference by fostering community pride, improving quality of life, and strengthening economies. Indeed, both business and community leaders are championing the tenets of stewardship and revitalization because they help attract and retain the next generation and help achieve competitive advantage. Further, championing stewardship and revitalization helps keep a community vibrant—a healthy place to live, looking to the future, connected to the past, and maintaining a strong sense of community pride and responsibility.

Connecticut River -

Massachusetts and Connecticut community leaders gathered to create a vision for growth and conservation in the Connecticut River Valley. *Photo: Courtesy of Whitty Sanford, Connecticut River Watershed Council.*

Hanalei Heritage River -

Hanalei community participates in riparian restoration using native Hawaiian plants. *Photo: Courtesy of Adam Asquith.*

Potomac River - A group of students from Forest Park High School examining an electric vehicle at a recent Founder's Day celebration at Prince William Forest Park.

Rio Grande - Volunteers do much of the restoration work at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park in El Paso, Texas. *Photo: Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso.*



The AHR Initiative is working because it is locally-driven; helps build local capacity; fosters partnerships among communities, government, and business; is responsive, efficient, and effective; ensures balanced and continuous economic, environmental, and social/cultural progress; delivers results; attracts resources; encourages a watershed perspective; and enjoys nonpartisan support. Community and business partners have attributed the success of the AHR Initiative to the following factors:

- White House backing;
- High-level agency access;
- Intergovernmental focus (not in one agency or department);
- Broad focus that addresses all three “legs of the stool” (i.e., environmental stewardship, economic development, and historic/cultural preservation);
- Secretariat with dedicated resources for coordination and communication; and
- Federal agency accountability.

Community partners have seen first-hand the benefits of the AHR Initiative. Indeed, the initiative has been a catalyst for many projects and achievements. Examples of accomplishments include:

- *Providing improved access* – communities that lacked effective access to federal agencies are now being heard through the assistance of River Navigators, federally-supported liaisons for each designated river.
- *Leveraging federal investment* – AHR has returned 10:1 on federal investment.
- *Fostering and communicating a community vision for local river systems* – AHR, through its River Navigators, has been very effective in sharing each river’s community vision to provide strategic direction to federal and state programs.

- *Building broad-based partnerships* – AHR has been extremely successful in building strong institutional structures that have helped communities reach agreement on priorities and that have communicated these priorities locally, regionally, and nationally.
- *Achieving a balanced approach among economy, environment, and society* – communities are ensuring that consideration is given to economic, environmental, and societal concerns in decision-making processes.
- *Adding value to community projects* – through a process of clarifying roles and responsibilities, the federal government has been able to focus its resources to help make community projects a reality.
- *Sharing information* – local communities and federal agencies now have a steady, reliable stream of information assisting them to accomplish their missions.
- *Fostering flexibility* – through direct participation in local AHR institutional structures, the federal government has been able to enter into partnerships and cooperative agreements with their community partners that have proven effective in delivering federal assistance.
- *Creating efficiencies* – because of the spirit of cooperation that exists in the AHR Initiative, accessing federal and state programs has been more efficient in achieving results for communities, and communities are learning to use federal agency processes more effectively, some for the first time, thus avoiding delays and frustrations in obtaining federal assistance.

The AHR Initiative is an excellent example of a community-driven effort that is achieving substantial results. AHR communities have enthusiastically embraced the federal government’s desire to assist them in restoring their rivers, preserving their economies, and celebrating their history and cultures. Communities have invested considerable time, effort, and resources to make this initiative a success. This nonpartisan initiative is poised to achieve even greater success as a result of the foundation that has been laid. Further, it has laid the groundwork and developed an infrastructure, thereby cultivating the next generation of Americans to care for our nation’s rivers and strengthen the

American Heritage Rivers: Local partnerships working to create vibrant river communities—healthy places to live, that are looking to the future, connected to the past, and maintaining a strong sense of community pride and stewardship.

communities and economies that rely on them. The problems associated with restoring American Heritage Rivers can be resolved more cost-effectively through strong partnerships between federal and state governments, tribes, and local communities and businesses that pool resources from all sources—as embodied in the AHR Initiative.

Community Partners Recommend That:

- The Administration ensure the continuation and enhancement of the existing framework of interagency cooperation identified in Executive Order 13061 by:
 - Continuing the Interagency Committee at the Under Secretary level and an Interagency Task Force to champion goals of the Initiative;
 - Allowing federal agencies to continue sponsoring full-time River Navigators as the focal point for our AHR efforts and providing them with sufficient resources to enhance their ability to provide the services and assistance we seek; and
 - Providing increased focus and direction to federal agencies for commitment of resources to match community, state, and other investments in AHR projects.
- The Administration consider designating six new American Heritage Rivers in 2003.
- The Administration ensure adequate staffing of the AHR Initiative through creative interagency partnerships.
- Agencies give priority to AHR “keystone projects” for funding.
- River Navigators continue to streamline red tape and help deliver community priorities.
- Community partners attract more business partners to the AHR Initiative.
- All levels of government communicate the value and benefits of AHR in an effective and timely fashion.
- Senior agency management continues to participate in national AHR conferences, as was held on October 8-10, 2002, in Detroit, Michigan.

Community partners have called for strengthening, sustaining, and even expanding the initiative based on the success that it has achieved. To date, the AHR Initiative has achieved substantial success, including helping to leverage \$250 million in funding for natural resource and environmental protection, economic revitalization, and historic and cultural preservation. Summaries of accomplishments for each American Heritage River follow. Again, the AHR Initiative has returned no less than 10:1 on federal investment. The AHR Initiative has proven that our great nation can indeed balance and achieve progress in all three areas—environment, economy, and history/culture.

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Bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and bog turtle programs, among others, are a priority in the Hudson River watershed.